

The Rules of Reading

Syntopicon Analysis

Volume 18a

Books To Use For Syntopicon Analysis

- **How to Read a Book 1940- Mortimer Adler.**
- **How to Read a Book- The Art of Getting Liberal Education By Mortimer Adler.**
- **How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide To Intelligent Reading By Mortimer Adler & Charles Van Doren.**
- **How to Read a Book: Revised and Updated by Mortimer Adler & Charles Van Doren**
- **How to Read a Book: A Guide To Reading The Great Books By Mortimer Adler**
- **How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide To Intelligent Reading By Mortimer Adler & Charles Van Doren.**
- **How To Read A Book: Revised and Updated by Mortimer Adler & Charles Van Doren.**

The Fourth Level of Reading: Syntopical Reading

A. Understanding Syntopical Reading

Syntopical reading refers to the practice of reading multiple texts on a single topic to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding. It is a method that emphasizes comparative analysis, where readers engage with various perspectives to synthesize their own insights.

B. Establishing the Foundation

1. **Relevance of Multiple Texts:** Recognize that in any intellectual inquiry, especially complex subjects, consulting various texts enhances comprehension and provides a spectrum of viewpoints.
 - Example: Exploring climate change requires reviewing scientific studies, political analyses, and social critiques to appreciate its multifaceted nature.
2. **General Selection of Books:** Determining which books to read is a critical initial step in syntopical reading. While identifying relevant texts may seem straightforward, it often poses significant challenges due to the breadth of available literature.
 - Challenge: With thousands of works published on a topic, narrowing down to those that provide substantial insights requires careful consideration.

II. Defining the Subject Matter

A. The Complexity of "Same Subject"

1. Clarifying Terminology:

- What is meant by "same subject"? The term can have different meanings depending on the context, leading to confusion in academic discussions. It is essential to clarify what constitutes the "same subject" before delving into multiple texts.
- Example Comparison: Consider works like *Gone with the Wind* and *War and Peace*. While both address the theme of war, they approach it through distinct narratives and characters, highlighting different human experiences.

2. Contextual Analysis:

- Recognize that while both novels incorporate war, the focus is on personal stories rather than war itself. This distinction shapes how readers should approach these texts.
- Implication for Reading: A reader should engage with these novels not just for their historical context but for their literary merit and the insights they offer into human emotions and societal impacts during times of conflict.

B. Applicability Beyond Fiction

1. Expository Works: The complexity of defining the subject extends beyond fiction to expository texts. Understanding this can help refine one's reading strategy.
 - Example: When exploring philosophical concepts, such as justice or freedom, different authors may define these terms in various ways, complicating direct comparisons.
2. Example of Love: Investigating the concept of love illustrates the vast array of interpretations available.
 - Key Insight: The term "love" encompasses a wide range of human experiences and emotions, from romantic attachment to deep friendship and familial bonds.

III. Investigating a Subject Thoroughly- Use Rules of Reading For analysing various texts for various texts for each step.

A. Researching the Topic

1. Creating a Bibliography:

- Compile a comprehensive list of texts that are relevant to your topic of interest. Utilize various methods to gather recommendations.
- Methods of Compilation:
 - Consult experts or professors in the field for their recommendations.
 - Explore library catalogs and databases to identify authoritative texts.
 - Examine bibliographies from credible scholarly articles and treatises for additional sources.

2. Conducting a Preliminary Review:

- Conduct an initial review of the collected texts to understand the range of perspectives and themes present in the literature.
- Observations: A brief skimming of the contents may reveal recurring themes, differing opinions, and significant areas of agreement or disagreement among authors.
- Example: While reviewing books on love, you may find some texts focus on psychological aspects, while others delve into philosophical or cultural analyses.

B. Delving into Varied Perspectives

1. Range of Interpretations:

- Identify how love is conceptualized in different texts. Some authors may define love primarily in terms of desire, while others may view it as altruism or companionship.
- Socratic Questioning: What underlying assumptions guide each author's interpretation? How do cultural or temporal contexts influence these definitions?

2. Comparative Analysis:

- Explore the contradictions and agreements between various definitions of love. For instance, some may argue that love necessitates desire, while others assert that true love is selfless and without expectation.

- Further Inquiry: Do these differing views enrich or complicate the understanding of love? What can be inferred about human nature from these varied definitions?

IV. Refining the Focus of Inquiry

A. Limiting the Scope

1. Narrowing Down: Consider narrowing your focus to specific aspects of love to make the inquiry more manageable and coherent.
 - Example: Instead of addressing all forms of love, focus solely on romantic love or the love between family members.
2. Recognizing Complexity: Even within a narrowed scope, you will likely encounter numerous interpretations and definitions that may challenge your understanding.
 - Key Insight: This complexity necessitates an openness to revising your initial definitions and frameworks as you gather new insights from your readings.

B. Exploring Relationships

1. Differentiating Forms of Love:
 - Investigate how love manifests differently among various relationships, such as romantic partners, friends, and family members.
 - Key Questions:
 - How does the expression of love differ in friendships versus romantic relationships?
 - Does the nature of love evolve as relationships progress or change over time?
2. Investigating Emotional Nuances:
 - Delve into the nuances of love in various contexts, questioning how cultural or social factors impact these emotional expressions.
 - Socratic Inquiry:
 - Can friendship and romantic love coexist, and if so, how do they influence each other?
 - What role do societal expectations play in shaping our understanding and experience of love?

V. Identifying the Subject Matter Through Reading

A. The Paradox of Syntopical Reading

1. Reading to Define Subject Matter: Acknowledging that true comprehension of the subject may only emerge after engaging with multiple texts, rather than before.
 - Key Insight: The act of reading itself can lead to revelations about the subject, as new ideas challenge preconceived notions.
2. Iteration of Understanding: As you read, you may need to refine your definitions of the subject, recognizing that some texts may not address it as you initially thought.
 - Example: After reading several works, you might find that certain texts do not explore love in a way that aligns with your inquiry, prompting you to discard them in favor of more relevant literature.

B. Concluding Observations

1. Evaluating Findings: After completing your readings, assess which texts genuinely contribute to your understanding of love and its various interpretations.
 - Reflective Practice: Consider maintaining a reading journal to record insights, questions, and evaluations of each text's contributions to your understanding.
2. Final Reflection: Recognize that syntopical reading is an iterative process. Your understanding may evolve, leading you to seek further readings or to reassess earlier conclusions.
 - Example: After synthesizing insights from your readings, you may decide to explore related topics, such as the psychology of relationships or cultural influences on expressions of love.

VI. Engaging in Socratic Dialogue

A. Using Socratic Questions for Deeper Analysis

1. Fostering Critical Thinking:
 - Encourage an ongoing dialogue about your findings by posing challenging questions to yourself and others.
 - Examples of Questions:
 - What assumptions underlie the various interpretations of love?

- How do historical or cultural contexts shape the way love is perceived and expressed?

2. Facilitating Group Discussions:

- If possible, engage with peers in discussions about the readings, encouraging diverse perspectives and deeper analysis through group dialogues.
- Example: Organize a reading group where each participant presents their insights on different texts, followed by a group discussion to explore common themes and differences.

B. Conclusion of the Inquiry

1. Synthesizing Insights: At the end of your reading and reflection, synthesize the insights gained to articulate a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.
 - Example: Summarize the key themes, contrasting views, and any commonalities you identified throughout your readings.
2. Future Reading Paths: Identify areas for further exploration that could enhance or challenge your understanding of the initial subject.
 - Reflection: Consider which aspects of the subject you wish to explore further, perhaps leading to future projects or specialized readings.